Teaching Health Care in Virtual Space

Codier, Estelle

Published by University of Hawai‘i Press

Codier, Estelle.

University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/67426.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/67426

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2374257
CHAPTER 17
Designing a MUVE Learning Activity, Part II
Implementing MUVE Learning

This chapter reviews the strategic considerations for integrating MUVE learning activities into a course. Included are such topics as making an activity mandatory or optional and ways to progressively course MUVE learning activities from optional to mandatory gradually as a way to deal with student resistance or negative perceptions of new learning technology.

This chapter is for you if:

1. You are designing a MUVE learning activity and are interested in a guide for strategic integration of the activity into a course.
2. You are interested in a systematic and staged way to develop your own MUVE teaching skills.

Integration of MUVE Learning Activity into a Course

Once an instructor has concluded that it is the right time to teach a MUVE learning activity, that the class content is a good match for MUVE learning, that the students have a good chance to be successful in MUVE learning, and that there is both adequate technological support for the activity and sufficient time for orientation, it is time to start planning. Planning for successful MUVE learning begins with strategic decisions about integration of MUVE learning into a course. How will the MUVE learning activity fit into the course? Will it be a mandatory activity or an optional one? These questions must be considered as the instructor makes strategic decisions about integrating MUVE learning into a course.

Optional or Mandatory?

It is recommended that an instructor begin MUVE teaching with an optional, very informal MUVE learning activity with a small number of interested, motivated, and tech-savvy students. Over time, in later courses, instructor can
increase the number students in MUVE activities he or she is planning. This can happen gradually as instructor skill and comfort level increase. Eventually, the instructor will be ready for a whole class to be involved in mandatory MUVE learning. Gradually increasing the number of students as the instructor shifts MUVE learning from optional to mandatory enables the instructor to gradually increase the number of student problems and degree of resistance he or she manages. This enables the instructor’s own MUVE skills to improve gradually.

Levels for Gradually Integrating MUVE into a Class or an Instructor’s MUVE Teaching

- Level 1: Try an optional learning activity “on the fly”
- Level 2: Take one small step: The optional assignment
- Level 3: A MUVE learning activity as an extra-credit option
- Level 4: A MUVE learning activity as an alternative to an existing assignment
- Level 5: The “no thank you” MUVE assignment
- Level 6: The mandatory MUVE assignment

The following is a progression of levels an instructor can use to develop MUVE teaching skills from the relative ease of an optional MUVE assignment to a more demanding mandatory assignment. It can also be used as a road map for gradual integration of MUVE learning into a course or across time with a particular group of students progressively developing MUVE learning skills.

LEVEL 1: TRY AN OPTIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY “ON THE FLY”

Sometimes taking a leap and trying something on the fly can be a great way to begin. The circumstances need to be right and the risk low. My own experience has shown that this can be a great experience.

Talking Story: Trying It on the Fly. One semester, I was concerned about a small group of highly motivated overachievers in my class. I felt that they were bored and increasingly disinterested as the rest of the class plodded along covering some pretty difficult course material. The small group was beginning to check out. It was time for me to take action or risk losing both their interest and their contributions to the class. I had been considering offering an optional
extra-credit MUVE learning activity later in the course but decided it might be fun to challenge the small bored group with it right away instead. At that point in the course, the class was doing small group discussions. I offered anyone in the class the option of doing the discussions in MUVE instead of face-to-face. I offered MUVE orientation sessions and the group began. Most of the bored group participated. They loved it and asked to continue the mandatory weekly discussion groups in MUVE. They actively recruited classmates to join them. Their enthusiasm was infectious. They sold MUVE learning to their peers by sharing their experiences with the rest of the class, who got curious (and a little jealous). When it was time to offer the optional MUVE learning activity later in the course, not only was the class already interested and eager to join in, but I had a core of students who were happy to lead the discussion groups and mentor those who needed assistance.

**LEVEL 2: TAKE ONE SMALL STEP:**
**THE OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENT**

The first formal step into a MUVE learning activity should be one that does not involve the whole class and is voluntary. The advantages are as follows:

1. There will be a small number of students involved since an optional assignment will not appeal to the entire class. This makes a first MUVE learning activity easier for the novice MUVE instructor to manage.

2. Students who volunteer are typically motivated and energized. If not sold on MUVE learning, they are at least open to it and have a positive overall attitude. This means that the instructor can focus energy on activity design and implementation. Less time will be spent on having to sell the idea to students who may be resistant, uninterested, or need a lot of support with new technology.

3. A small MUVE learning activity with a few students gives both instructor and students a chance to deal with unexpected problems more easily than if they are happening to the whole class at once.

4. With a small, less formal MUVE learning activity that involves only a few students, the stakes are lower. There is less pressure on instructor and students. If the activity is not a total success, the negative impact is minimized.

5. Feedback from a small number of participants is easier to solicit and manage than getting it from a lot of students all at once. How many times does the instructor need to hear “There was not enough orientation?” before they know they need to revise their activity plan?
LEVEL 3: A MUVE LEARNING ACTIVITY
AS AN EXTRA-CREDIT OPTION

A MUVE learning activity offered for extra credit has an excellent chance of success. Students are often motivated to do whatever it takes to get extra credit. This should not, however, be the first MUVE learning activity that an instructor attempts. Students who want extra credit the most are often students who are not performing well in the class. Their grades are low and they need extra credit. This is not the ideal student for a first MUVE learning activity. They are motivated, but not necessarily for reasons that may make them successful in MUVE learning. In addition, even students with good grades often want extra credit, and an instructor may find there are more students wanting to participate than the instructor has resources or time for.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to do a MUVE learning activity for extra course credit. Students who want extra credit are indeed highly motivated. Given the chance to improve their grade (which often gives them a sense of control and hope—student agency is a powerful thing), these students often are motivated to complete the MUVE orientation and do as much MUVE learning as they can. The extra motivation helps them sail through the orientation and gives them extra impetus to solve any particular problems that come up during orientation or early MUVE learning. Some of the best-performing MUVE learners I have worked with were those who badly needed extra course credit. Many of these students also reported that they learned better in MUVE activities. A MUVE learning activity for extra credit not only may give struggling students extra credit but also may provide them with a way to learn that may be more effective for them.

I discovered this when it became apparent that students who did not need extra credit were attending extra-credit learning activities. The same thing was happening with lower performing students who had maxed out on the amount of extra credit they could receive but continued to sign up for optional MUVE learning activities. When I asked them about this, both groups responded with comments like, “This really helps me learn” and “This is where it comes together for me.” Although extra-credit MUVE assignments do tend to attract a lot of students, it is unlikely that everyone in the class will participate, so once again, a smaller number of students will likely be involved in the activity.

LEVEL 4: A MUVE LEARNING ACTIVITY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO AN EXISTING ASSIGNMENT

This is a useful next step for some of the same reasons extra-credit assignments are a good early step into MUVE learning. A MUVE learning activity alternative
to an existing assignment will not typically appeal to the whole class, which means that it will involve a smaller number of students and therefore be more manageable. Making a MUVE learning activity available also enables students to select a learning modality that works best for them.

Students usually report that, once they have completed MUVE orientation, they spend less time completing MUVE assignments compared with other learning activities. The efficiency of time and resources appeals to many students. Students report that they can be more flexible and economical with their time and resources with MUVE learning. This makes sense considering what it really takes to do a small group discussion in person. Face-to-face groups involve time spent dividing the class into groups, having them physically move to the area where the group will meet, sitting down and getting organized, and then gradually getting down to work. Students who do MUVE learning activities perceive that it is a more effective use of their time. At the agreed-upon time, students log into the MUVE and the activity begins nearly immediately. Because students know the session is recorded in a transcript, they get down to work quickly. They tend to accomplish group tasks more effectively. Because they know their participation will be evaluated, participation is more even qualitatively and quantitatively across the group. Based on my observations over years, MUVE activities take roughly 50 percent less time than equivalent face-to-face activities to achieve the same goals.

Offering a MUVE activity as an alternative to a regular assignment also helps manage student resistance. If students come into class with resistance on the basis of preexisting negative attitudes (“I heard you do this Second Life® thing in this class, which I can’t do because . . .”), it is a good strategy to offer the MUVE learning activity as an alternative to an assignment that students usually don’t like or find difficult. Students may overcome their own resistance to a MUVE learning activity if they view it as a preferable option.

**Instructional Note:** If a series of optional MUVE learning activities are offered throughout a course, it is preferable to let students opt in or out of them at any time. This option involves more logistical work for the instructor, but it can be worth the additional signup and tracking time. In one series of weekly discussion groups, as the weeks went by, more and more students chose to do the MUVE discussion group. Students in the MUVE groups recruited and mentored their friends. The energy and fun of the groups became contagious. This ended up being better for the students because more students got the experience of learning in virtual space, and learning outcomes were far superior. It was also beneficial to the instructor. Beginning with a relatively small group of MUVE learners and then gradually increasing the number of students over time enabled me to gradually increase my MUVE learning activity management skills.
At no point did the MUVE teaching seem overwhelming. This is a great way to keep the project manageable and gradually build MUVE teaching skills.

**LEVEL 5: THE “NO THANK YOU” MUVE ASSIGNMENT**

Remember when you were a child who didn’t want to try a new food at dinner? Did your mom ever insist that you have a “no thank you” portion? This serving consisted of a tiny pile of whatever it was you didn’t want to eat. You had to try it, but you didn’t have to eat much. Sometimes, you hated it. Sometimes you found a new favorite food! The no thank you assignment is like that.

The no thank you assignment can be a good approach for a first MUVE assignment that will take place in a series over time, for example, weekly discussion groups. With this approach, the instructor tells the class they all have to orient to MUVE learning and do one MUVE discussion group, but after that they can choose a face-to-face discussion group if they prefer. There are some advantages of trying this assignment approach prior to MUVE learning activities later in the course. After doing the “no thank you assignment,” the one small mandatory MUVE learning activity, some students who thought they would not like it find out they do. When students who have a great deal of resistance to a MUVE learning activity are told, “You only have to do it once . . . if you don’t like it, you don’t have to continue,” their resistance usually decreases. After the assignment is completed, some of the resistant students find they did like it and continue with MUVE work. The others who prefer not to do MUVE work still had the experience of learning outside their comfort zone, which is in itself beneficial. The “no thank you” approach in a mandatory assignment, paradoxically, gives students a sense of control that supports their learner agency. Sometimes they find out they really like the new “food”!

**LEVEL 6: THE MANDATORY MUVE ASSIGNMENT**

A mandatory MUVE learning activity is not necessarily any better than an optional one, but sometimes for pedagogical reasons, it is desirable to have the entire class involved in the activity together. For learning activities that are very complex and are dependent on a known number of participants, a mandatory activity is often preferable. When a course is presented entirely in a MUVE or has objectives that can only be met in a MUVE learning activity, the mandatory option is necessary.
Chapters 16 and 17 have reviewed the design, implementation, and strategic issues related to integrating MUVE learning into a course. In the next chapter, Chapter 18, several special circumstances for implementing MUVE learning are discussed, including using MUVE learning when students do not have their own personal computers and using MUVE learning to improve an existing course.